

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CHIROPRACTIC PROFESSION

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Chiropractic is one of the largest primary-contact health professions in Canada with over 6,000 practicing chiropractors. Approximately four and a half million Canadians use the services of a chiropractor each year. Despite the profession's growing popularity, there are still many in the public who don't exactly know what services a chiropractor performs or what qualifications and training they possess. This article is the first of a two part series introducing the chiropractic health discipline and the profession's role in the health care system.

Chiropractic celebrated its 110th birthday in 2005, yet its roots extend to the beginning of recorded time. From Hippocrates (The Father of Medicine) and Galen (The Prince of Physicians), to the 19th century bonesetters in the British Isles, many individuals throughout history have recognized the importance of the spine as related to overall health. Hippocrates (460-377 B.C.) was the first physician to link spinal dysfunction with ill health. His students were advised to "*get knowledge of the spine, for this is the requisite for many diseases.*" Canadian born Daniel David Palmer (1845) is known as the modern day father of chiropractic. He coined the term "chiropractic" from the Greek words "*chiro*" meaning "hand" and "*practic*" meaning "practice" for a literal translation of "practice by hand". Early chiropractic philosophy relied on the premise that spinal dysfunction and misalignments were thought to negatively influence the functions of many biological processes.



Over the last 100 years, chiropractic has evolved substantially due to the growing demand for increased accountability and the use of procedures, protocols, and treatment interventions that are backed by scientific research. Contemporary chiropractic philosophy and practice extends beyond just spinal care. It has a strong scientific base, which is reflected in the educational process. Chiropractic students undergo a rigorous course of study similar to that of other health professionals. Training involves a minimum of three years undergraduate university education, followed by another four years of intensive academic and clinical education at an accredited chiropractic college. The chiropractic college curriculum includes a full year clinical internship along with courses in; anatomy, biochemistry, neuroanatomy, physiology, embryology, histology, pathology, immunology, microbiology, clinical biomechanics, neuroscience, nutrition, orthopedics, radiology (biophysics and protection, x-ray interpretation and diagnosis) and clinical sciences specifically relating to diagnosis and treatment.

Becoming licensed to practice chiropractic requires all eligible candidates to pass rigorous national and provincial examinations before applying to the Licensing Board. Licensing colleges in respective provinces strongly encourage chiropractors to attend seminars and conferences, and read professional journals to keep up with ongoing research and development within the profession. This professional development keeps the chiropractor well equipped with the skills needed to provide patients with safe and effective chiropractic care. Specialized post-graduate training enables the chiropractors of today to offer their patients more choices as to the treatment options available through chiropractic care.

Chiropractic in Canada is regulated by provincial statute in all provinces (The Chiropractic Act, 1991), created in accordance with the Regulated Health Professions Act (RHPA, 1991). Chiropractors along with medical doctors, dentists, psychologists, and optometrists have the legislated right and obligation to communicate a diagnosis and to use the title doctor. The College of Chiropractors of Ontario, like the colleges in each of the other provinces, is similar to the regulatory bodies for other health professions. It is responsible for protecting the public, standards of practice, disciplinary issues, quality assurance and maintenance of competency. This self-regulating and disciplinary process ensures that the public's health concerns are the chiropractic profession's highest priority.



Chiropractic is well recognized within the health care system. Chiropractic care is covered by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) for occupational injuries, by your automobile insurance in the event of a motor vehicle accident (MVA), and by many Extended Health Care (EHC) plans. A medical referral is not necessary to access chiropractic care and chiropractors work together with other health professionals when managing patient complaints and conditions. A survey in the *Canadian Family Physician* reported that 44% of Ontario and Alberta physicians indicated that they refer patients for chiropractic treatment. A large majority of patients who seek chiropractic care do so for complaints of the musculoskeletal system (joints, muscles, tendons, nerves and bones), such as back and neck pain. In addition, chiropractic training today equips the practitioner with skills in examination, diagnosis, and physical treatment of many non-spinal complaints such as shoulder, elbow, wrist, hip, knee and ankle dysfunction and pain. Where other medical conditions exist, chiropractic care may complement or support medical treatment by relieving the musculoskeletal aspects of discomfort associated with the condition.

Chiropractors deal with disorders related to the entire musculoskeletal system. They provide diagnosis, treatment and management of those disorders. Chiropractic adjustments are just one mode of therapy utilized by chiropractors today (but not with every patient). Chiropractors are also trained to employ other forms of physical therapy such as acupuncture, electrotherapy, soft tissue therapy, rehabilitative exercises, and nutritional counseling. If your complaint is not something that would respond favorably to chiropractic care, a referral is made to the appropriate health professional.

Additional chiropractic resources can be found at: (www.nhwc.ca), (www.chiropractic.on.ca), and (www.ccachiro.org). Join us next month for the second part of this series on chiropractic where you will learn about the chiropractic experience from a patient's perspective.

This article is a basic summary for educational purposes only. It is not intended, and should not be considered, as a replacement for consultation, diagnosis or treatment by a duly licensed health practitioner.